

Snapshots by FateChica

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Summary:

Glimpses of a life lived happily ever after....

Or, Mike and El over the first 18 months of their relationship.

1. February, 2 Months Together

Summary for the Chapter:

Well, you all wanted it so badly...

I decided to write an epilogue!

The shape of this is heavily inspired by the prompts for Mileven Week, so join me in watching our favorite couple continue to fall in love...

This chapter is inspired by the prompt: Long Distance

“LA sucks.”

A bright giggle, rendered less potent over the airwaves that separate them. “*Mike*. You’ve only been there for 2 hours.”

Mike pouts, flopping back onto the bed, and stares up at the generic, albeit *very nice*, hotel ceiling. “So? Don’t need more time to know that it sucks.”

“Warm, sunny temperatures, palm trees, sandy beaches...yeah, I can see why it sucks.”

It doesn’t make Mike feel any better that El’s totally teasing him right now – especially not when he’s looking for some goddamn sympathy over here – so he cuts to the heart of the matter. “Yeah, well, LA doesn’t have *you*.” Yes, it’s an especially sappy admission, but Mike really doesn’t care.

Especially not when El lets out a cooing sigh and, *god*, he can practically see the blush crawling up her cheeks, alluringly pink and irresistibly gorgeous, spreading across her skin and begging for him to chase with his lips.

But she’s 2000 miles away and he *can’t*.

“Aww, I miss you, too,” El says. “But it’s only for a few days. You’ll be back on Friday.” Her voice is soft and wistful, but somehow also

soothing and Mike gulps at the way the sheer love he feels for her swells in his chest.

“Yeah, I know,” Mike says. And, he does. “I just....” He trails off with a sigh, letting disappointment pull him further into the mattress. “It was supposed to be our first Valentine’s Day this Thursday.”

“Yeah, I know,” El says. “And it sucks that we’re going to miss it, but you’ll be back for the more important date.”

Friday, February 15th: their two month anniversary. Two months since the day El grabbed him in the hallway outside his classroom and kissed him in a way that almost made him forget his name. Mike grins at the thought. “Hey, you still haven’t answered my question about that, by the way: dinner in or out?”

“Well, considering how we’re not going to get to *be* together for the next 3 days, I’m thinking *in*,” El says, voice rich with a suggestion that has beginnings of desire picking up in his veins.

Mike groans, even as he’s smiling. “Are you imagining what I’m imagining?”

“If it’s you and me and dinner in bed from that Greek place we like so much while we are wearing absolutely zero clothing, then, yes, we are imagining the exact same thing.”

The image, given life by El’s voice, hits him like a punch to the gut and Mike suddenly feels *really* short of breath. “God, I love you.”

“I love you, too,” El says, the words infused with rich emotion. “So, really, how is LA? How’s your hotel room? I hope the movie studio shelled out good money to put you up somewhere. You’re going to make them a lot of money, so you’ve earned it.”

It’s the only reason why he’s out in LA at all. After going back and forth for weeks with that damn screenplay, the studio wants to hash out the final version and start talking about things like casting and filming locations. And they want Mike to be there to help provide creative input into those talks, those decisions.

So, Mike took a few days off of work, arranged a substitute, and let

the movie studio fly him out to LA (first class, by the way) and booked him a fancy hotel.

In theory, Mike should be loving this. He's always loved exploring new places and seeing new things. And he's never been to LA before. This should be a great experience for him.

But all he's thinking about is that he's not going to be sleeping next to El tonight, that he's not going to be able to feel her next to him, all svelte curves and soft skin...that he's not going to be able to make love to her, the first night since their official first date that he won't be able to.

Ever since that first date, the two of them have been all but inseparable – spending the night at one of their places (though usually El's; that bed of hers is so damn comfortable), getting ready for work together in the morning, going home together at the end of the day, figuring out dinner, snuggling on the couch...just everything Mike's ever wanted to have with another person, something he's amazed he gets to experience with the most beautiful woman he's ever met.

He's experiencing El-withdrawal...and he hasn't even been separated from her for 24 hours yet.

Man, whoever said distance makes the heart grow fonder can go fuck themselves.

But, dwelling on it isn't going to help him now. And El asked him a question, so he's going to answer it.

"Yeah, it's pretty nice," Mike says. "Swanky, too. There was this really cool fountain in the lobby of the hotel, actually, that looked like something Greg would sculpt...."

For the next hour, Mike and El talk on the phone – El in Chicago in her bed, Mike in a hotel room in LA – their talk moving from Mike describing the hotel he's staying at to how his flight was on the way over to something funny El saw on the internet that she wanted to share with him. They flit from topic to topic with ease, the excitement of a brand new relationship still sparkling in their voices,

the ache of missing each other keenly felt, magnified by the miles that separate them.

It's late by Chicago time, though relatively early for California, when Mike lets out a yawn that cuts him off mid-sentence. "Ugh, I should probably go to bed," Mike says. "I think all the traveling has me beat."

El giggles. "Lightweight," she says.

"Yeah, well, some of us aren't seasoned international travelers," Mike says.

"Well, we're just going to have to fix that," El says. "But, you should get to bed. You have a long day tomorrow. And the sooner you get to sleep, the closer you are to coming home to me."

Mike's heart does a dangerous flip at hearing El say those words. *To me.* "I'll always come back to you."

"I know," El says, sighing. "I love you, Mike."

"Love you, too, El. G'night."

"Sweet dreams."

Mike hangs up the phone and swallows roughly at the lump of emotion in his throat. He lets himself wallow in self-pity for a good minute before he pushes himself off the bed so he can get ready to go to sleep, feet shuffling sadly against the carpeted floor all the while.

Mike goes to bed alone that night, a lot grumpy and *really* tired.

But it's nice to know that El's waiting for him, counting down the days until he gets back to her, until they can be together once more.

And, tomorrow night, when El surprises him over video chat with a *very* thrilling game of "guess what I'm wearing under this robe", Mike can maybe, *maybe* see how a long-distance relationship might be a little exciting.

But when he's finally back in her arms a few days later, ready and eager to celebrate the milestone of two months of being together, he

knows that nothing could ever take the place of being with her for real, that he never, *ever* wants to let go of her.

Guess it's a good thing he already has plans for how make her a permanent part of his life, isn't it?

Notes for the Chapter:

Whee, hope you enjoyed that! Not sure how long this is gonna be (probably 5-6 of these smaller chapters, if I had to guess). These are really just supposed to be snippets of their lives together. I'll try to have the next one out tomorrow, so keep a look out for that! And let me know what you think!!

(Also, sorry if it ends weird. I wrote it in two hours.)

2. April, 4 Months Together

Notes for the Chapter:

Here's part two, my lovelies!

Inspired by Day 2's theme, Fate.

The light pollution in Chicago is too strong to let them see the stars, but it's a nice night outside, regardless. The moon is a few days away from being full, barely shrouded by wispy clouds that slowly streak by, and the temperatures are almost warm enough to make El forget all about winter's chill (though it's not *warm* warm, it's still better than a couple of months ago). Off in the distance, El can hear the faint sounds of the city – the low metropolitan hum that whispers hints of cars racing on asphalt and the rush of trains on tracks, punctuated by the occasional car driving by on nearby streets or the bark of a dog or a whoop of laughter from people have a good night – and she's grateful for the noise.

Helps to hide the noises she and Mike were making only a few minutes ago, all gasping cries and throaty moans and desperate words of passion.

Mike's townhouse has a little backyard patio surrounded by a high fence that completely shields the space from the neighbors, and they're lying on the ground with a queen-sized air mattress beneath them. It's not one that's meant to be used outside, really, but they're only on concrete and there's a couple of warm blankets shielding their naked skin from the cooler air that may seep up through the thin vinyl of the mattress. Add in the down quilt draped over them *and* the fact that Mike's a human furnace, and El is quite comfortable.

Comfortable and *incredibly* satisfied.

El lets out a sound that is somewhere between a sigh and a moan, limbs feeling light and airy, satisfaction writ large across every inch of her. She curls up against Mike's side and burrows her face into his neck, her nose pressing lightly against his skin. Mike's arm comes up to hold her close and El shivers a bit as his fingers begin trailing in a gentle sweeping motion up and down her arm just above the her

elbow. It's a touch that's almost teasing (and, if El knows anything by this point in their relationship, it *will* be in not too long), but for the moment it's comforting.

In return, El brings her hand up to rest lightly on Mike's chest, where her fingers begin tracing random patterns on the skin stretched across his sternum. *God*, she loves the feel of him beneath her touch....

Mike sighs, sounding just as sated as she feels. "*God*, I love how flexible you are." His voice is low, *husky*, filled with sinful satisfaction that never fails to make her shiver.

El giggles. "As long as that's not the only reason why you love me...." she says as warmth infuses her chest.

Mike snorts. "I think it's why my libido loves you," he says with a tone that tells El he's *totally* rolling his eyes right now. "But there aren't enough words in all the languages in the world for me to describe all the reasons I love you."

It's like a thousand butterflies take off all at once from the center of her heart and El feels each and every tremulous beat as it squeezes in her chest. She just loves him so much and has no idea what she did to deserve someone who loves her back with just as much fervent intensity. "You sap," she says, sniffing a bit.

"Truth teller, you mean," Mike says and his head shifts just enough so he can press his lips against the top of her head in a ghosting kiss. There's pause that fills with anxiety as the moment grows longer. "Um, it doesn't bother you, does it?"

El lifts her head, folding her arm over Mike's chest so she can prop her chin on her forearm. "Does what bother me?"

"I kinda just objectified you, there," Mike says, chin tilting down so he can look at her. The arm not holding her is folded behind him between his head and the pillows they brought down from his bed upstairs and everything about the sight only highlights for her how wild his hair is right now. "Commenting on your flexibility like that."

El is quiet for a moment as she thinks. Mike's definitely not the first

man she's slept with who's made a comment about that, who's not loved how flexible she can be in bed. But, unlike all those other men, Mike's never made her feel dirty about it. And while he's made it clear that he finds it hot-

(really hot, if some of the things they've done together are any indication; really, between her flexibility and his creativity, el's surprised they haven't set fire to either of their bedrooms yet.)

-El also knows that Mike loves her for reasons that have nothing to do with her body.

And his worry about objectifying her is Exhibit A of that love.

El leans up after a beat to press a light kiss against Mike's lips, relieved to see the pinched, worried expression fade from his face. "It would if that was the only thing you loved about me," she says. "But, since it's not, it's flattering to know that you find me physically and sexually attractive." She pauses, grinning. "Besides, when I'm with you, I love how flexible I am, too."

Mike grins, looking almost boyish as amusement tugs up on his lips. "Yeah?"

El winks at him. "Makes it fun, makes it good." And it does, really. They've been sleeping together for just over 3 months now and every time it just gets better. El keeps waiting for the honeymoon period to fade, figuring that it *must* eventually, but she's starting to think that it's always going to be like this with Mike: overwhelming passion, hot and fun and sweet, loving and all-consuming, the physical manifestation of all the love they feel for each other.

Mike lets out a laugh that edges on hysterical, like he can't believe she's *real* (a notion she hopes to be able to reassure him enough into letting go; if she has it her way, she's *never* going to be anywhere but by his side). "You're an incredible woman, you know that?"

"So you tell me every day," El says, leaning up for one last kiss, this one lingering a little longer than the previous one. She settles back against him, relaxing even further in the cocoon of his arms, just enjoying everything about this moment. "I'm glad you suggested we

come out here tonight, by the way.”

Mike snorts. “Oh my god, double entendre much?” he says with a laugh, which draws a laugh from her, as well. “Also, not what I had envisioned when I suggested we set up an air mattress and watch night sky, but I’m not complaining,” Mike says.

El lets out a snort. “Right, like you didn’t think we were going to end up *here*.” Please, she wasn’t born yesterday.

There’s a pause. “Alright, fair. But, in my defense, it wasn’t what I had *immediately* envisioned.”

“Uh huh, so...how long did it take for you to start thinking about having sex outside?”

“Hmm, about 5 seconds.” Mike moves the hand on her arm down so he can pinch her hip. “And don’t take that tone with me. You were the one who started us off with your sneaky little hands.”

A yelp escapes from El at the pinch on her hip before she starts giggling. “Well, what can I say? You’re absolutely irresistible.”

“And I love that you think that. If only high school me knew that one day, a very beautiful woman would be wildly attracted to me,” Mike says with a smile that fades the very next moment as he sighs, face turning pensive.

El frowns. “What’s that look for?”

“Just thinking again about all the things that kept us from meeting until last year,” Mike says. “I was thinking about how different everything could have been if we’d actually met in high school.”

El hugs him tighter. They don’t talk too much about this – it’s pretty painful to think of all the lost years that stretch between and behind them – but it doesn’t mean it’s not on her mind on a regular basis. And there are some conclusions she’s come to about this that she hasn’t shared with him. Until now. “I think we met when we were supposed to,” El says after a second. “I think we were always supposed to meet, but not until *both* of us were ready.”

It's Mike's turn to frown. "What do you mean?"

El sighs, turning so she can look at him again. "In high school and especially after, I was so focused on ballet. Yeah, I dated, but it always came second to my dancing. I was always travelling or in rehearsal and it was definitely a strain on more than one of my relationships." She looks away briefly, heart pounding at the sadness of the words she's about to say. "I think if I had met you then, I wouldn't have pursued a career in dance. I would have fallen in love with you much younger and done something else in order to stay close to you and I would have always regretted not pursuing dancing as a career."

Mike looks at her, eyes intense, and he reaches with the hand not behind his head to tuck her hair softly behind her ear. "I would have waited for you, I wouldn't have let you give up your dream."

El shrugs. "I think you would have *become* my dream, though. And, looking back on it, I'm glad I spent all that time out in the world, exploring, seeing what it had to offer. I wouldn't give up the path that brought me to where I am for *anything*, not even you. And, so, I think the universe waited until I was settled until before introducing you into my life."

Mike smiles through the incredulous love that drapes over his features. "The universe, huh? You think the universe has that much of a stake in us?"

"Oh, absolutely," El says. "We're meant to be, you and I."

"You think?" Mike asks and there's a desperation lurking in his gaze that tugs on every heartstring El has.

"There isn't a universe that exists where I'm not with you," El says, her throat growing thick with emotion, all the love she has for him mixing with the surety of her statement. She reaches up once more, leaning in so she can brush her nose against his. "Accept it, Wheeler, it's fate," she says.

"I like the sound of fate," Mike says, holding her close, squeezing her tight against him. "Still doesn't mean I don't wish I'd met you

sooner.”

“Yeah, I know. But I think playing the what-if game is a dangerous temptation. It’s so easy to get lost in what-ifs that you forget about what’s right in front of you.” The beginnings of a grin work their way onto El’s face, a sudden burst of inspiration sparking in her brain, and she moves, sitting up and throwing a leg over his hip so that she’s straddling his waist. The cool night air bites at her exposed skin, but Mike’s warm beneath her as he looks up at her, eyes bright and awed in the moonlight from above them. “And, speaking of what’s right in front of you...”

Mike laughs, the solemnity of the moment fading into love, happy and warm. “You’re insatiable, you know that, right?”

El leans over him, her hair falling about their faces as she leans over and curtaining them from the outside world. “Please, you know you love it.”

“Like I love you,” Mike says. His hands go to her waist, thumbs tracing shiver-inducing patterns in the hollows of her hips, and he looks up at her with eyes that are growing heavier with want by the moment.

El gasps as a frisson of desire bursts across her skin and runs down her spine, and she shifts against him in response. “I love you, too,” she says.

Mike grins. “Wanna show me how much?”

It’s a teasing statement, given the mood that’s growing between them, but the question hits El right in the heart. And she smiles, softly and so very in love with this beautiful, *beautiful* man. “Always,” she whispers before she kisses him, both of them gasping against each other’s lips before they lose themselves in each other like they always do, the love that exists between them unable to be contained and El hopes it never will.

Always and forever.

Notes for the Chapter:

So, I kinda took the long way 'round to get to the theme of the day, but I think I managed to make it work well enough.

Up next, something for Day 3's theme: High School Reunion. Hopefully, I can actually get it *out* tomorrow, but definitely by Friday (got something of a busy day tomorrow, unfortunately). But stay tuned and I hope you enjoyed this!

3. June, 6 Months Together

Notes for the Chapter:

I was hoping this would have been out yesterday, but t'was a very long day and I had NO TIME for writing.

Which *sucks*.

But, I did it!

Also, this is SUPPOSED to be for Day 3 of Mileven Week, which has the theme "High School Reunion", but there's no high school reunion? And half of it is written from Hopper's POV? So...*shrugs* it was gonna be a stretch no matter what I did.

(Still, it was inspired by it, so that's something at least, right?)

Anyway, hope you enjoy!

“Are you ok? You’re...*sweating*.”

The question comes when they’re an hour away out from Hawkins and Mike wishes he didn’t flinch at the words coming from El’s mouth.

Dammit, he’d hoped it was a little less obvious....

But, he also knows he can’t lie – El sees right through him in a way that’s as scary as it is freeing – so Mike doesn’t even bother trying. “Yeah, no, not really,” he says, voice tight with the stress that’s building inside of him, anxiety churning in his gut. “I’m just... *nervous*.”

Mike spares a quick glance out of the corner of his eye as he drives, to see El looking back at him with a concerned frown. “Why?” she asks, squeezing his hand where it’s holding hers over the center console.

“Cause we’re going to introduce me to your dad.”

El lets out a giggle that is both kind and amused. “Mike, you’ve *already* met my dad.”

“Yeah, but that was *years* ago, way before you and me.”

This is something that’s been haunting him for *months*, since the early days right after “The Big Reveal” (as Mike’s taken to calling it). He doesn’t even know *what* made him think of it all those weeks ago – just that it hit him while they were snuggling on her couch while they watched a movie.

“Oh *god*,” he’d said out of nowhere. “I’ve met your dad.”

Mike had looked over at El to see her bemusedly looking back at him. “Yeah, I guess you have, huh?” she’d said like it was something that was merely cute, a happy coincidence...

Like it wasn’t something Mike was Very Suddenly freaking out about.

Because while Mike doesn’t have very many memories of interacting with Jim Hopper, the ones he does have?

Are intimidating as *fuck*.

Big man, built like a brick house; loud, booming voice; flat, inscrutable gaze; scary firearm strapped to his side as he moves with the weight of absolute authority.

In short, Jim Hopper had scared the *shit* out of teenage Mike, something which hadn’t faded the last time Mike saw the man only a few years ago. And Mike had barely been aware of El’s existence then. How was Hopper going to react now that his step-son’s nerdy-as-shit best friend was *sleeping with* his daughter?

El just laughs, though, as Mike drives them down the road that leads to Hawkins. Her laughter’s not unkind by any stretch, but completely missing the point in Mike’s estimation. “*Mike*,” she says. “He already *knows* about you and me. And he’s looking forward to seeing you again.”

“Yeah, but was that in an honest ‘I want to get to know my daughter’s boyfriend’ kind of way? Or ‘I wanna see him again to put the fear of god in the punk who thinks he can get away with being with my little girl’ kind of way?”

Mike can’t see it so he can’t be sure, but he can just *feel* the eye roll El’s giving him from the passenger seat. “Mike, it’s going to be *fine*. *Trust me.*”

When El all but tells him she’s in love with Mike Wheeler, Jim isn’t initially able to put a face to the name.

It’s the end of January when she mentions it during one of their calls. “Hey, Dad, I just wanted to let you know that the guy I’m seeing? I think he might be the one,” El says, sounding a little shy, but really happy.

Jim smiles from where he’s sitting in the living room, phone pressed against his ear. “Aw, that’s wonderful, sweetheart,” he says. “Is this the guy you were telling me about during Thanksgiving? The one you were talking to all throughout Christmas break?”

El lets out a giggle. “Yeah, Dad, that’s the one. And, as it turns out, you’ve actually already met him.”

Now Jim’s just confused. “I have?”

“Yeah, you remember Mike Wheeler? Will’s friend?”

Jim thinks for a second, going through his mental rolodex of names and faces. It takes him a bit, a figure appears in his mind’s eye. “Tall, dark hair, kinda lanky, really fidgety?”

“*Dad,*” El says around a chiding scoff. “He’s not *fidgety*.” She sighs. “But, yes, that’s the one.”

“I though the two of you hadn’t met yet,” Jim says, brow furrowing. He might not look like he’s listening, but Jim’s been a cop and

detective for a very long time and his brain files away details without knowing how to let them go. And he *knows* it's been a bit of a thing that Will teases El about that she hasn't met the last of his best friends.

"I thought we hadn't, either," El says. "But it turns out, we've been working together since September."

Ok, now Jim's just confused. And, as El tells him a bit of the story over the next 15 minutes, his confusion turns to a sense of incredulity that leaves him laughing, even after he gets off the call with El.

Jim remembers Mike Wheeler – not well, but he does. A scrawny, anxious teenager, turning into tall, fidgety, hyperactive adult. The last time Jim saw Mike was summer a few years ago when Will and his friends passed through Hawkins on their way to the coast for a beach trip, and Jim had been struck by just how Mike seemed to move a mile a minute, as if everything would fall apart if he stopped to take a breath.

So, how did he end up with Jim's quiet, sweet daughter?

Jim won't lie – he's *very* curious about how this relationship works. From what El mentions over the phone when they talk, everything seems to be going fine – *great*, even. But Jim's mind is having a hard time circling that square whenever he tries to imagine how they work together, how they play off each other.

So, when Jim finally gets his chance to meet Mike Wheeler as the guy who his daughter seems to have fallen madly in love with, Jim is eager, *excited*.

It's the weekend of Jim's 55th birthday. The whole family is coming home to celebrate...and El is bringing Mike with her.

Jon and Will aren't coming until late on Friday, but Mike and El are both off for the summer, so they're coming on Wednesday afternoon to spend a few extra days around Hawkins and away from the city.

Jim makes sure he's off work before Mike and El get there so he can greet them...and so he can spy on them as they arrive.

It's just before 4 when, from where he's sitting in the kitchen, Jim hears the sound of tires crunching against the gravel of the driveway and he's over to the window in a flash. He peers through the blinds just in time to see a car – black Audi, maybe 5 years old – come to a complete stop.

Jim watches as first El gets out from the passenger side, a soft and content look on her face, tinged with amused excitement. And then the driver's side door opens and Jim looks over as a tall, dark-haired young man practically unfolds himself from the front seat.

Mike Wheeler: 6'3" of awkward, nerdy lankiness, looking like he's about to pass out, face tight with nerves and anxiety.

Jim breathes out a quiet laugh at the sight.

Good, good to see he's appropriately nervous.

Because even though Jim's glad El's happy – just about the happiest he's ever seen her – it's still nice to know that her boyfriend seems to respect him (and El) enough to be nervous about meeting the father.

Jim keeps watching as Mike goes around the car to where El's standing, looking back at him with a gentle and reassuring expression. She reaches for him as he gets close and they talk quietly, mouths moving in words Jim can't quite make out.

Mike gives El a small smile after a bit, clearly reassured by whatever El is saying, and as Jim continues to watch, the two lean in, El stretching up while Mike leans down, so that their lips meet in a soft kiss. They part after a bit, but neither of them really pull away. They speak again and, this time, Jim can make out the shape of the words they say as they look at each other.

I love you.

It somehow both takes Jim aback and is not at all surprising at the same time. It's clear in the way El talks to him about Mike over the phone that she loves him, that Mike makes her so very happy. It always makes Jim happy to hear that El seems to have finally found someone who treats her like she deserves and, even though Jim

doesn't know Mike that well, he's already so grateful for this young man in El's life, that Mike cherishes her and makes her so happy.

But, at the same time, it's also a little shocking for him to *see* his little girl so in love, to see just how totally and completely Mike and El have fallen for each other. It's adorable and heartening and just *stunning*.

And Jim knows, as he looks at the two of them, so clearly in love with each other, that *this is it* – El's found the person she's going to spend the rest of her life with, God willing.

Jim knows some fathers would be sad – for some, daughters falling in love means losing their little girls.

But Jim's never felt like that about El, like she *belongs* to him until she finds a husband who she'll then belong to, passed around like property.

No, all Jim's ever wanted is El to be happy, to have someone in her life who loves her as much as she loves him.

And it looks like she has exactly that.

The couple head towards the front door, walking hand in hand across the gravel and Jim rushes to move away, to look like he was nowhere near the window.

No, it wouldn't do to be caught spying and he has a role to prepare for.

Because, though he's happy that El seems to have found someone who deserves her, who makes her so very happy, that doesn't mean that Jim can't mess with his future son-in-law by "putting the fear of God" into the kid, now does it?

"See, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

Mike snorts from where he's lying next to her, both of them dressed for bed (her in a tank top and tiny sleep shorts, him in just a pair of shorts), and El hears the slide of his hair against the pillowcase as he turns to look at her. "Hopper just about broke my hand when he shook it," he says.

El cranes her neck to look at him. "He's just a firm-handshake kinda guy. Everyone says that."

"No, he was fucking with me. All those sly remarks about when I used to spend time here on vacation with Will? Totally making fun of me."

El rolls her eyes. "That just means he likes you. *Trust* me. If he didn't like you, you'd know."

Mike just looks at her for a moment, skeptical. "Really?"

El smiles and leans up to kiss him. "Really. I would never lie to you about this, Mike. He likes you. Yeah, maybe he's not about to be your best friend. But he's happy for us, I know it."

A smile graces Mike's face after a beat. "Ok, I guess I have no choice but to believe you." He pauses, arching an eyebrow. "I'm still not having sex with you in this bed, though. *That's* just a road too far."

El just laughs. "That's ok," she says with one last, soft kiss. She thinks of the bikini she packed and the shaded grove on the far side of Lover's Lake she used to frequent when she wanted to be alone and she *cannot wait* until tomorrow. "I have...*other* plans."

Mike grins, then, excitement dancing in his eyes. "Ooh, care to share?"

"Let's just say it's a surprise. One I *promise* you'll like."

"I can't wait," Mike says as he holds her tighter. "As long as we won't get caught, whatever it is."

"If we do, I'll protect you," El says, biting back a giggle.

"Aw, my hero," Mike says, voice going soft and fond.

“You know it.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Up in the next couple of days, hopefully: "moving in together"!

Hope you enjoyed this!

4. August, 8 Months Together

Notes for the Chapter:

Another Mileven Week inspired chapter!

This time, it's "moving in together"...

Enjoy Mike Wheeler, the King of Grand Gestures,
being uber-schmoopy, everyone!

The first summer Mike spends with El is just *magical*.

Both of them are mostly off for the summer – El's still involved with her dance company and for Mike, work continues apace on both the first movie based off his books and going through the editing process for his third book – so they pretty much have nothing to do but spend time with each other.

Which they do.

All the time.

There are days spent exploring what the city has to offer, Mike seeing things with new eyes now that El's by his side. There are trips up to Lake Michigan to spend the day by the water, or impromptu weekend trips planned at the spur-of-the-moment a romantic getaway. They even take a handful of days and fly to Hawaii, where they spend the entire time either on the beach, shaded beneath palm trees as they enjoy fruity beach drinks with little umbrellas, or holed up in their hotel room, exploring and loving each other – really just being ridiculously and overwhelmingly in love.

Back home, there isn't a night they don't spend together. Mike's pretty much all but moved in to El's brownstone, but they still spend about a third of the time over at Mike's place, so there's a lot of bouncing back and forth, their stuff slowly spreading between the two houses.

And though Mike *loves* the fact that he and El are pretty much living together, not having all of his stuff under one roof, not having a place

to call *theirs*, is frustrating the ever-loving hell out of him and there's nothing he wants more than to have a space they can call their own, a space that is the perfect combination of him and her.

Ok, realistically, the thing Mike *actually* wants the most is to spend the rest of his life by El's side, happy and blissfully in love, but he can't do that without a place for them to live, now can he?

All of this occurs to Mike really early on in their relationship, sometime in the beginning of March, *especially* about the whole 'living together' thing. (The whole 'spend the rest of his life with her' thing has been crystal clear to him since, oh, about 2 seconds after she first kissed him.)

Mike wants to live under the same roof with El, wants a place where they can be together, away from the watchful eyes of the world – a place where they can start their lives together, for the future he wants to build with her, marriage and family and children and growing old together and *all of it*.

So, with this thought in mind, Mike decides that the best solution is to buy a house.

And he decides that it's going to be a *surprise*.

Part of it is that Mike *knows* if he goes to El and tells her the kind of house he wants to buy for the two of them, she'll try and talk him out of it. El is surprisingly cautious and level-headed about some things and Mike loves that about her, he really does – loves how she keeps him grounded and anchored as he goes off on flights of fancy. But the kind of money Mike's thinking about spending is, well, *neither* cautious *nor* level-headed.

But, really, most of what's fueling this is the fact that Mike's a not-so-closet romantic. He loves romantic gestures, both small and grand, loves surprising El with something that he *knows* she'll love. And Mike knows, just knows, that if he finds the perfect house, she'll love it. Hell, she's made noises about the two of them moving in together as far back as the beginning of April – adorably frustrated comments about wishing all her stuff was in the same place, or murmurs of wanting to set aside a space for Mike to do some writing somewhere

at her place but having no idea *where* – so Mike knows that El won't say *no* to the two of them living together.

He's just hoping this won't be too much.

Really hoping.

In May, Mike finds a real estate agent. The first time Mike meets with the guy at the real estate agency's office after work while El's at dance rehearsal. Mike tells the guy what he's broadly looking for and, when the agent asks him what his price range is, Mike very much enjoys the shock that crosses the agent's face when Mike tells him.

Because, the thing is, Mike has money.

A lot of money.

He pretty much lives on his teacher's salary, which means that the vast majority of the money he's made first by being a writer and then by selling the rights for his books to be a movie series (honestly, when he saw that first advance check amount from the movie studio, Mike nearly passed out) is just sitting in his savings account, *waiting* for him to spend it on something.

And, at this point, Mike's a millionaire, so that's a lot of money that's just sitting around.

It takes a while to find the right house. Mike susses out some of the things El wants in a house with sly, casual questions, never pushing, letting it come out in natural conversation. And everything that El reveals – a room for a small library, a place for her to try her hand at gardening, a large and open great room where she can entertain their friends – Mike files away and goes back to the real estate agent with.

Mike works with the agent primarily over text and email, scheduling time to go look at houses around El's rehearsal schedule, hoping that each time he goes out, he'll find it.

He doesn't find it until July, after two months of searching, increasingly getting frustrated the entire time at how it feels like he's *never* going to find the right house.

So, naturally, when he does, Mike knows it immediately.

And it's *perfect*.

Two stories, 4 bedrooms, detached mother-in-law suite, nice sized backyard, open concept floor plan, all done in bright grays and silky whites as the rooms flow neatly from one to the next.

Mike can see it almost instantly, him and El in this space: making breakfast together during a lazy mornings, lounging in the backyard on plush patio furniture, snuggling in bed in the master suite, making love on the couch in the family room. His brain carries him down further, future stretching out in front of him with startling clarity (*rings on their fingers; el with a belly swollen in pregnancy; the bright laughter of children, first as babies, then as older kids; happy and content, a life so full it overwhelms him*).

He makes an offer on the house later that day, willing to bid as high as 10% above asking price if he can make sure he gets this house.

He does and, by the middle of August, he's closed escrow and is the proud owner of a house, keys in hand and everything.

Now, all that's left is to surprise El with the biggest purchase he's ever made in his entire life.

*(he has another surprise waiting for her, a small velvet box tucked in with a box of tiny knick knacks el would never think to look in **just in case**. but one surprise at a time. there'll be time for that later.*

*but not **too** much later.)*

"Mike, where are we going?"

It's a gorgeous Saturday outside the car, the kind of Saturday perfect for lounging at the lake or exploring the city, as Mike drives them to...*wherever* they're going.

El hasn't been able to get *anything* from Mike since he asked her to go on a drive with him and to "trust him" when she asked what was going on. And it's bothering her more than she cares to admit.

Mike breathes out a laugh and glances over at her. "Honestly, what part of 'trust me' don't you understand?"

El pouts in the most dramatic fashion and thumps back against the leather seat beneath her. "Don't like surprises."

"Yeah, I'm starting to gather that," Mike says, laugh picking up to a full-throated chuckle. "Not much longer now, though. So just...sit tight."

El gives Mike a look out of the corner of her eye, suspicion tangling with what she can only describe as building excitement. She's known for weeks that Mike has been hiding *something* from her, but she hasn't at all been able to figure out *what*. It isn't something bad, that much El can tell – no, they've been just as happy and in love as ever, in a way that's almost impossible to fake.

So, while El doesn't know what it is, she *knows* Mike's surprise has whatever to do with what he's been hiding.

El looks out the window, then, knowing she's not going to get anything out of Mike, no matter how much she pouts, and decides to concentrate instead on the scenery that passes them by. They're in a suburb not too far from work, but one that El hasn't passed through before. Large houses pass by on the other side of the window, all sprawling lawns and brick facades, gorgeous and tugging at El's heart with envy. These are the kinds of houses she's always dreamed of having one day, the kind where she could settle down with the man she loves and raise a family.

God, just the *thought* of having a house like this with Mike makes her heart feel heavy in the best way possible, deep desire settling over every inch of her.

And then Mike turns down a street and parks the car a couple of houses away from the corner. He smiles over at her. "C'mon, let's go."

Beneath the excited smile on Mike's face is sheer nervousness and hope and El feels her own heart race at the sight, nervousness picking up in her as well. "Mike, what is this? What's here?"

He reaches for her across the center console with a hand that's trembling a little, his palm settling over her forearm, the heat of his skin just as thrilling as it always is where he touches her. "I'll explain in a minute. Just...not in the car?"

Mike's pleading with her, begging her with his eyes and with the trembling of his hand, and El knows she'll go wherever he leads them. "Ok, let's go, then."

They get out of the car, the humid, summer air wrapping around them with thick laziness, and they don't speak at all as she follows him up the walkway and towards house's large front door. El takes a moment to look at the house – two stories, faded brick façade, yard neatly landscaped, and she wonders just what Mike has here that he wants to show her, to share with her.

And then, when they get up to the front door, El waits for Mike to knock on the door or ring the doorbell, but her heart jumps into her throat instead when he reaches into his pocket for a small keyring, and the trembling in his hands has gotten worse during the walk over from the car, because it takes him a moment to line up the key to unlock the door.

El can't keep quiet anymore. "Mike, what's going on?" she asks, her voice sounding small and breathless.

The door swings open and Mike turns around, shaky smile pulling at the corners of his lips. He takes her by the hand and leads her inside, saying nothing until they're standing in the middle of a grand foyer, ceilings high above them. El spares a moment to look around, absently marveling at the beauty of the house around her – large, open concept floor plan, the colors bright and warm, *welcoming*. And even as El's heart races in her chest, a deep sense of calm settles over her, a sense of *welcome home*.

And when she looks back at him, El gasps at the way Mike's looking at her – gaze soft and fond and so, so hopeful. "Mike," she breathes,

asking him with the simple utterance of his name to tell her what's happening.

"Do you like it?" Mike asks, just as hushed.

"What, the house?" El asks, incredulity filling her. "Mike, it's a *gorgeous* house, but-

"I bought it," Mike says, cutting her off. "Got the keys a few days ago, actually."

Shock rings through her like a clarion bell and El feels like she's about to pass out. "A house? You bought a *house*? Why?" It's a stupid question. El knows the answer, but...she needs to hear him *say* it.

"I want to *be* with you, El Hopper. I want to share *everything* with you." He pauses, taking in a deep breath, and steps forward so he can take her face in his hands, thumbs brushing gently against her cheekbones. "Move in with me. Help me make this house *ours*."

And there it is. Butterflies *explode* in El's heart, alighting her from within, making her feel like the whole world's just within her grasp. She can't help it as tears fill her vision, feeling so overwhelmed with emotion, that she doesn't know what to focus on first.

He bought them a house. A place for just the two of them, where they can build a life together instead of ferrying back and forth between their two places, a place where they can continue to grow together, can continue to love each other, where they can *be* together...

And it's everything she's *ever* wanted.

El answers Mike with a kiss, words failing her under the power of his gaze, and she surges up onto her toes, hands grabbing him by the front of his t-shirt so she can pull him down to her. Their lips meet in a kiss that both sets her on fire and makes her feel like she's *soaring*, and both of them let out gasping whimpers as their mouths slant against each other's, hands shifting so they can hold each other close.

When they pull away, both of them are fighting to catch their breath. But they're smiling so wide, El wouldn't be surprised if their faces freeze this way. "So, I take it that's a yes?" Mike asks.

El giggles, all light and bright and *holy shit*. “*Absolutely* yes,” she says. She reaches for his hands where they’re still holding her, fingers entwining as she clasps them between their bodies. “Show me,” she says. “Show me our home.”

Mike laughs and the sound is so free, El falls in love with him all over again.

He shows her around, then, pointing out all the things he loves, all the space for the things they both want to do. And the entire time, El can’t help the way her heart thumps steadily in her chest, the rhythm of it gentle and persistent in her chest.

Home, it says. *Home*, sweet *home*.

Notes for the Chapter:

Up next: "in the rain" (oh boy, I love the idea I have for this...)

Hope you enjoyed!

5. September, 9 Months Together

Notes for the Chapter:

Wow, did I not think I was going to be this close to being able to post it on the last day of Mileven Week.

Granted, it's *not* Mileven Week anymore (though maybe it is in Hawaii or smth), but I'm still damn close!

This is for the prompt "In the Rain" and, well...I hope you enjoy!

(and now I gotta go to bed. it's almost 1:30 here and
Y I K E S)

It would figure that the *one* day Mike wants everything to be as perfect as possible, is the day absolutely *everything* falls apart.

It's no one's fault, really – both Mike and El start the day on the wrong foot and it just spirals from there.

It's a few weeks into the school year and the both of them are just running *ragged*. El's wrapping up the summer season with her dance company, so she's in performances near constantly, while she's trying to help a whole score of incoming transfer students plus a very green St. Ignatius freshman class. Mike, meanwhile, is trying (and somewhat failing) to juggle his normal classes, plus a new AP Chemistry class, *plus* consulting for the movie of his first book which is in the middle of filming.

They barely see each other at all during the day, pretty much only able to spend time together when they're both getting ready for work and then at the end of the day when they go to bed – if they go to bed in the same city, that is, what with the trips Mike's been taking to where the movie's being filmed during the weekends.

They're increasingly cranky, feeling stretched way too thin; they haven't been able to finish unpacking after moving in together in the

middle of August, so their house still feels like a bomb went off in it, cluttered and unorganized; and, since all of their time is taken up with other obligations, they *miss* each other – it's been *weeks* since they've spent any real time together and neither of them are adjusting to it very well.

All in all, Mike and El are frustrated, stress and anxiety bubbling just under the surface, just waiting for something to set them off.

So, really, looking back on it, Mike really isn't surprised when both of them explode.

It just *really* sucks that it's on the day he's planning to propose.

It's Mike's first weekend home in almost a month after he begs off from flying out to LA, saying that he needs a break for a couple of days from all the travelling. The studio lets him, just so long as Mike promises to be in cell phone reach just in case, to which Mike readily agrees to.

Mike's glad because, pretty much since he asked El to move in with him, he's been carrying around a tiny, velvet bag in his pocket, tied securely closed to keep the sparkling engagement ring he picked out weeks ago safe and sound (the original ring box is much too bulky – and thus *way* too obvious – to be carrying around), waiting for the right moment to propose.

Because Mike Wheeler is going to marry El Hopper.

He just has to have the time to *ask* her.

So, in bed late on a Friday night – his first Friday night sleeping next to El in weeks – Mike turns to where El is half asleep and runs a finger down her bare arm, tugging her gently from unconsciousness. “Hey, I have an idea,” he says, quiet.

El opens her eyes and gives him a sleepy smile. “What is it?” she asks, almost slurring the words. She's had a long day, Mike knows,

going from school straight to the performance hall to be on stage, and she only got home about an hour ago.

“Since you don’t have to be to the theater until 5 tomorrow, why don’t we go out for brunch, just you and me? We can go to that cute French bistro place you’ve been wanting to go to.”

El lets out a scoff, a little more awake now. “Chez Celene? *Mike*, it just opened a month ago. You need a reservation and they’re booked up for weeks.”

Mike grins. “Well, it’s a good thing I managed to snag one then, isn’t it?” Honestly, Mike doesn’t want to think about how many strings he had to pull in order to get a reservation at this place (and, holy shit, making friends with big name actors who he can ask favors of certainly has it’s uses), but it’s worth it at the bright smile that cuts across El’s face.

“You did?” El asks, letting out a shocked giggle. “Oh my god, Mike. You’re amazing. I love you.”

Mike leans in, kissing her softly. “I love you, too.”

El reaches for him, then, smile turning into a coy grin. “Wanna show me how much?” she asks, winking.

Mike laughs; even though exhaustion pulls heavily at both of them, they still want each other. Besides, it’s been *days* since he’s made love to her and that is way too long. Still, he can’t ignore the fact that they’re both tired, so he feels like he needs to mention it at least. “As long as you’re ok with lazy sex,” he says, leaning in once more.

“Sounds perfect right now,” El breathes before their mouths meet once more and all talking ceases as they lose themselves in each other.

Mike goes to bed that night, snuggled up naked next to El, feeling excited for what tomorrow is going to bring, satisfied beyond measure, and unaware of just how much he missed her until he finally got to *be* with her again.

It’s really just too bad their good mood doesn’t last past the following

morning. But not even a night of sex, no matter how good (and it's *good* – really, *really* good), can erase weeks of frustration and stress.

They're in the middle of it before Mike even knows what's going on. Words that are a little too short, laden with frustrated meaning - an underhanded comment about how he hasn't helped at all with the unpacking, a snippy remark about how she never puts his things away right – and suddenly, the air between them is tense and thick, just on the edge of boiling over, simmering just beneath the surface. It doesn't help that it's grossly humid outside, like Chicago has noted the air between Mike and El and responded accordingly.

So, suddenly, on top of being hot and uncomfortable, it feels like every little thing is going to be the thing that gets on his very last nerve and Mike feels like he is *thisclose* to actually snapping at her.

But he's so committed, goddammit. No, he made this reservation and he's *going* to ask her to marry him today. Come hell or high water, *this is happening*.

Mike is very much aware that he's being a stubborn asshole about this, that maybe, *maybe* he should reconsider this plan, that maybe they should just stay in and go to their separate corners for a while.

But they *both* climb into the car for what ends up being just the tensest drive of Mike's entire life. He and El barely speak the entire ride to the restaurant and every good thing Mike should be feeling right now sours in his stomach.

They arrive at the restaurant and Mike cringes as El slams the door closed a little too hard. But she still reaches for his hand as he comes around the other side of the car, fingers squeezing his gently. He looks down at her, seeing the apology in her gaze, and he squeezes back. Some of the tension bleeds away, washed clean by the overwhelming love he feels for this woman, and they chat lightly as they walk into the restaurant, El cooing over the décor and the smells coming from inside, Mike watching her with loving happiness. Really, all he needs is *this*: her happy and by his side - he can weather everything else so long as he has that.

There's a moment, then, where Mike thinks that maybe he'll be able

to salvage something from this day, even though it didn't start off all that great, that maybe they're over the worst of it.

And then the movie studio calls him. At first, it's a quick call, just a small question. Mike answers quickly and hangs up just as fast, smiling over at El with apology.

But then the movie studio calls again. And then again. And then a 4th and 5th time.

And each time, Mike watches El sink lower and lower in her seat, her face getting stonier by the second. And though he feels bad, some sympathy or just a little understanding would be nice. It's not like he planned this, but it's not like he can just *not answer* the phone. This is his *writing career*.

"Look, if you were going to be on the phone the entire time, maybe we shouldn't have gone out today," is what El says after Mike hangs up with the movie studio the 5th time.

Mike's not sure what about this sets him off: the way El's crossing her arms over her chest, the flat look she's giving him, the derisive tone in her voice, or just the set of her shoulders. But all of the frustration finally bubbles over and Mike finds himself snapping. "Look, I don't expect you to understand trying to juggle all of this," he says, gesturing to her with his phone. "But a little sympathy would be nice."

"*This?*" El quotes back, mimicking his gesture. Her face is red, now, livid, eyes raging with anger. "So, what, I'm something you have to *manage?*" She opens her mouth to say something, but snaps her lips shut a moment later as she takes in a deep breath. "You know what?" she says. "I can't with any of this right now." And then El moves, grabbing her things and storming from the restaurant before it feels like Mike can even blink.

It takes Mike about a nanosecond after El leaves to realize that he horribly fucked up – that *they* horribly fucked up (it does take two to tango, after all). They've been stressed and stretched thin and fraying at either end; it was really only a matter of time before they lost their tempers. There just hasn't been enough time for them to talk out

their frustration and stress and worry.

But the worst has been how little time Mike's been able to spend with her. They've been living together for just over a month and *he's barely been here for it*. And Mike's also realizing that he relies on El to help keep him stable. These days without her, after spending every possible waking moment with her for just over nine months, have been just the worse. She's a balm for his soul, her presence both soothing and exciting in a way that never fails to make him feel like the luckiest man on the face of the planet – she's his *home*, and he never, *ever* wants to be without her.

So why are you sitting here while she's running away? Away from you?

"Shit, fuck. Fuck fuck fuck," Mike scrambles to get to his feet and practically empties all the cash in his wallet on the table next to their half-eaten food before he's running out the door, heart in his throat. He frantically looks up and down the sidewalk, looking for *her*, needing to run after her so he can apologize and tell her that he loves her and beg, *beg* her to forgive him, to not leave him.

Mike spots El just as she's rounding the corner at the end of the block to his right and he immediately takes off after her, his long stride eating up the distance that separates them. The entire time, his heart is racing, skin buzzing with panic and fear, feeling way too tight as adrenaline courses through him.

He just needs to catch her so they can talk this out, so she won't leave him.

So they can always be together.

(he was gonna propose today.)

It doesn't take Mike long to catch up to her – El might be walking fast, but Mike has a good 10 inches on her *plus* he runs 4 days a week. So it's no time at all Mike's reaching for her. "El, wait!" His hand encircles her elbow, grabbing her just enough to make her stop and turn around. "El, I'm–"

"You're *what*, Mike?" El asks as she whirls around to look up at him.

But Mike can't find his voice for a second. Because El's looking up at him with eyes that are shimmering with tears. Yes, there's anger and frustration, but above all, there's *hurt*. Hurt that he's responsible for.

He made her cry.

In that instant, any and all lingering anger and frustration disappear with a suddenness that almost makes him dizzy. "I'm sorry," Mike says, heart feeling like it's dropped into his stomach, limbs tingling as regret rushes through him. "I'm so sorry." He's sorry for all of it – for being gone so much, for taking his frustration out on her, for not being there for her, for not making the time to talk this out earlier. "I haven't been fair to you," he continues. "I'm not the only one who's been busy, who hasn't had to juggle around a bajillion things. And you're not something I have to manage. You never *will* be." Mike pauses, gulping. "I love you."

El ducks her head, anger fading to a poignant sadness, a soft smile cross her face despite it. She tucks her hair behind her ear and looks up. "I'm sorry, too. I could have said something sooner. Or suggested we not go out today at all. And I'm sorry for blaming you about the house, about the unpacking. I know you've been gone a lot and it's not fair for me to take my frustrations out on you, especially when I know you wish you weren't gone so much. I just...I *miss* you, Mike. I love you and I miss you."

El's lower lip wobbles dangerously and Mike can't stop himself from reaching for her. "Hey, now," he says, voice thick with emotion, his own eyes burning a bit as El comes to him, as easy as breathing, and wraps her arms around him with her head buried in his chest. The feeling of her in his arms will never, *ever* stop feeling like *home* and *love* and *everything* and Mike never wants to give it up. "No crying, ok? You cry, I cry."

El lets out a shaky laugh. "No promises."

And, as if the weather has been listening the entire time, the humidity chooses this very moment to reach its breaking point. The sky above them cracks with a loud thunderclap an instant before it starts to pour. And Mike and El, standing in the middle of the completely uncovered sidewalk, are caught right in the middle of it.

They both yelp, shock sharp and sudden slamming into them. “Come on!” Mike yells as he takes her hand so they can run for cover.

The shock has turned to laughter by the time they find a tree to duck under. Half of the leaves are gone, but the branches weave above them in a way that helps keep most of the rain from landing on them.

Not that it’s much of a help at this point. Mike and El are *soaked*, clothes clinging to their bodies like a second skin, and they’re both still laughing as they look down at each other. The relief from apologizing has mixed with the sudden shock of the rain and the combination is a heady one, all buzzing skin and tingling limbs and breathless abandon.

Mike looks down at El and it’s like he’s seeing her again for the first time. Her hair lays across her shoulders and back, locks laden with water, and she tries to push it back away from her face, but the water makes stray strands cling to her cheeks. That same water that drips down her face, across her lips, molding her clothes to the lines of her body, making his heart skip a beat or two as his blood slowly begins to heat up. But, most of all, El’s smiling up at him, her face bright and jubilant, relief etched beneath every inch of her expression. She reaches for him, then, shaking her head at him bemusedly. “God, we’re *soaked*,” she says around a giggle, hands coming up to wipe away the water that’s on his face. But her hands are still dripping wet, so it doesn’t help at all.

But none of that matters because Mike knows.

He *knows*.

This is it.

“Marry me.”

El’s hands freeze where she’s still touching his face and, for a moment, she just stares up at him. “*Mike*,” she breathes, almost laughing. “Be serious. I don’t think our ability to survive our first fight is reason enough to-”

But Mike’s already reaching into his pocket for the small velvet bag

he's been keeping the engagement ring in, fingers deftly untying the slip knot so he can fish it out of the bag. "I've never been more serious in my entire life." He pulls the ring from his pocket and looks down as he presents it to her. Mike hears her gasp, but he needs a moment, so he can't look at her. *Not just yet.*

He does, though, a moment after securely pinching the ring between his thumbs and forefingers. El's staring up at him, jaw dropped, tears in her eyes once again. But this time, it's not from him hurting her. "I've been waiting for the right moment for weeks," Mike says, his voice hushed. The rain is still pouring down around them outside of their makeshift shelter, cocooning them from the rest of the world. "I was hoping to do it today, but then...." He trails off, sighing, heart feeling like it's going to burst. "I love you, El Hopper. I love you more than *anything*. And I want to spend the rest of my life with you, loving you – and, yes, even fighting with you. Because even though this isn't the last time we're going to have an argument – we're both too stubborn for it not to happen again – there's no one else I'd rather be with. Because no matter what, I'm *always* going to love you."

Mike stares down at El, shock still playing across her face – she's barely even breathing, it seems – and he can't help it as he breathes out a soft laugh. "Just so you know, I had a much better speech planned, but I-"

"Yes."

For a moment, the world just *freezes*, hope tangling wildly in his chest, spurring on his beating heart. Mike gulps. God, he just needs to be sure. "Are you-"

"Yes, I'll marry you." Shock fades to happiness and El smiles up at him, bright enough to outshine the sun, making him feel *powerful*. She lets out a happy giggle, the sound almost overcome with emotion. "It's all I've ever wanted." Her hands are on his shoulders and she slides them up so she can clasp her fingers behind his neck, pulling him down towards her. Mike meets her halfway in a kiss that makes him feel like he's *flying*, and, making sure the ring is secure in his grip, he pulls her closer, arms encircling her as their lips move across each other's in deep, overwhelming kisses.

Holy shit he's kissing his fiancée.

Mike ends the kiss first, but he doesn't pull away, instead staying leaned in so his forehead can press against hers. "I love you so much," he says, voice tremulous as he just barely whispers out the words.

"I love you, too, *forever*," El returns, her hands clutching his neck before sliding up so she can cup his face, her thumbs brushing against his jaw.

But Mike's still holding the ring, so El's hands are going to have to move.

Gently, he reaches for her left hand with his right, fingers wrapping around it so he can clasp it between them. He looks at her, one last time, beseeching. And it's only after El nods, her breath hitching in her throat as she struggles to stay in control, that Mike slides the engagement ring onto her finger.

"Oh," El breathes out, adorably and beautifully transfixed by the sight of the metal encircling her ring finger. "Mike, it's *beautiful*."

"Not as beautiful as you," he says on reflex, meaning it with every fiber of his being. There will never, *ever* be anything or anyone as beautiful to him as she is.

El giggles up at him, head shaking with amused exasperation, but then she looks at him, her face sobering a bit. But her lips are pulled up in a smile, just a lot more incredulous and in awe than a few seconds ago. "We're getting married."

"We are, if you'll have me," Mike says, one hand coming down to rest on her hip while the other gently cups her cheek, the skin beneath his palm a little cool from the rainwater still splashed across it.

"I'll always have you," El says. "Forever and ever."

Mike looks down at her, temporarily rendered speechless as it hits him. *He's getting married*. He, Mike Wheeler, Nerd Extraordinaire, is marrying the most beautiful woman he's ever met in his entire life, a woman who is so kind and so sweet and so *amazing*, that he praises

all the lucky stars in the sky that he gets to have her in his life.

“I like the sound of forever and ever,” Mike says once the breath comes back into his lungs.

“Oh, good, I do too,” El says.

Mike can't stop smiling and it seems like El can't either as they stare at each other, incredulous and happy. Mike feels like he could power the whole *world* with how happy he is right now.

And he channels all of that energy into kissing her once more, her lips full and lush against his as she gasps into the kiss. El pushes up onto her toes as she holds him close, hands curled around the wet fabric of his shirt, fingernails scraping against his ribcage through the material. Need surges in inside of him, then, as their mouths meet over and over again, mixing headily with the overwhelming happiness he feels – *holy shit he's getting married* – and suddenly, there is no such thing as *close enough*.

Mike breaks the kiss with a sharp gasp, still smiling throughout it all.

Still so very in love.

“Come on,” he says, voice burning low. “Let's go home.”

El smiles up at him, then, and the urgent need tempers under the force of it, hardening into the deepest love anyone has ever felt for another person in the history of time. “Yes, home,” she says, breathless. She winks up at him, then, joy throughout every moment. “I do believe that I have something to celebrate with my new fiancé.”

El starts to walk away, practically skipping, but Mike stops her, grabbing her by the wrist and spinning her back towards him. A sudden flash of inspiration comes to him and, as she lands in the curve of his other arm, Mike holds her tight and dips her. The peals of laughter that spill from El's lips are the sweetest sound he's ever heard and Mike can't stop himself from leaning over to kiss her, drops of rain sneaking through the weave of branches to fall unnoticed on their skin and clothes.

Later, they'll part enough so they can go home – *oh god, home* – and

celebrate away from the prying eyes of the world, a celebration full of happiness and passion and a love so deep it swallows them whole. El will call in sick for her performance, giving her understudy a chance to be on stage, and they'll order dinner in as they connect and reconnect, learning the new depth being engaged brings to the love they already share. And Mike knows that he'll never, *ever* stop loving her.

But, for the moment, there's just Mike and El in the rain, kissing like nothing else matters.

Because, in this moment, nothing else does.

Notes for the Chapter:

So, ngl, this is for the anon who asked me if I would write Mike and El fighting. I don't know if this is what you were hoping for, anon, but you helped me figure out how to make this work, so I thank you.

(and, yes, I know I haven't answered your ask. I WILL I PROMISE)

6. May, 17 Months Together

Notes for the Chapter:

So, um, I wanted to get this out, like, yesterday? But I've been ensnared once more by Fallout 4 and, well, *I love installing mods*. So I've been splitting my time between writing and playing video games.

#noregrets

Anyway, there are no more Mileven Week themes to be inspired by, so you'll just have to accept my regular mileven-centric inspiration!

El and Mike get married on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend back in Hawkins, partially because it's the place where both of their families are from, but *mostly* because it's the place they should have met almost 16 years ago.

It's a beautiful May day – sun shining above, sky a brilliant blue only broken by thin, wispy white clouds, a hint of a breeze in the air.

The ceremony is just as beautiful, held in the woods behind the Hopper-Byers' house despite all of Karen's grumbling-

("Is everyone supposed to *hike* out there, Michael?")

"They do if they want to go to the ceremony, *Mother*.")

-and there, surrounded by family and close friends, Mike and El promise themselves to each other, 'til death do they part, both of them holding back tears the entire time as they exchange their vows, but smiling throughout it all with almost unbearable happiness.

The entire time, El feels like she's *floating*. After months of planning and dreaming and *hoping*, everything's *perfect*.

(Well, not *entirely* perfect – there's a moment of panic when Max can't find where El's bouquet is being stored and there's some minor drama with the seating chart for the reception, but it works itself out

and barely anyone is the wiser.)

2 years ago, El could have never imagined that she'd be here right now: married to the most wonderful man she's ever met in her entire life, a man who treats her like she's everything he's ever wanted, like there's no one more amazing on the face of the planet. El doesn't know how she got so lucky to have Mike in her life, to have his love and affection, but she knows she's never, *ever* going to let him go.

Guess it's a good thing she feels the same way about him, isn't it?

These are the thoughts running through her head as she sits at the small head table at the reception, taking a break from all the dancing while she watches Mike *try* to dance with Holly, his younger sister laughing at him the *entire time*.

(Look, she loves the man, she really does. But it's clearly *not* for his dancing abilities...*or lack thereof, rather.*)

So El sits there, feeling like a princess in the most beautiful dress she's ever worn in her entire life – an off-white satin, strapless dress with gorgeous silver embroidery, bodice hugging close to her torso before it flares out into a full skirt, a short train trailing behind her with delicate lace peeking out from beneath the hem of the satin – watching her goof of a husband (*holy shit, her husband*) try to spin and twirl Holly around the dance floor.

Once the song ends, El takes a sip of her partially filled champagne flute to help cool her down after laughing so hard and she's reaching up to wipe tears from her eyes as Mike approaches their table where their half-eaten dinner and mostly-eaten slices of cake are sitting.

Mike's all smiles as he sits down. He took off his jacket a while ago, draping it over his chair, so now he's just in his dress shirt and slacks. His bowtie is long gone and the top couple of buttons of his shirt are undone and, combined with hair slightly disheveled from all the dancing and merriment, he's the sexiest sight El's ever seen. "You know, I don't think *my wife* is supposed to laugh at me."

El giggles, even as her heart skips a beat. *His wife*. "If not me, than who?"

"Anyone *but* you." Mike's trying to be stern, but the amusement on his face is totally giving him away.

"Well, if *that's* the case, I think I want an annulment." El's also trying to look serious, but she's biting her lip to keep from smiling from ear to ear.

"No way, missy," Mike says, reaching for her. "You said 'I promise', no takes-backsies." His arms wrap around her waist and El goes willingly, butterflies alighting inside of her at the feel of his touch. She's giggling as she settles in his lap, her hands reaching for him, right hand settling on his dress-shirt covered chest just above his heart while her left comes up so she can cup his face, fingers resting lightly on his cheek.

Mike's hand comes up to cover her left, his thumb ghosting over her ring finger where her wedding and engagement rings are. But his gaze is focused on where El's still biting her lip, eyes darkening just enough to make her shiver. "And what have I said about biting your lip?" he asks.

El giggles again. "To keep doing it because it drives you crazy." Which, honestly, is *why* she does it.

Mike rolls his eyes. "Not what I said, but *true*."

"Hmm, maybe you should show me *how* it makes you crazy," El says, a teasing smile playing at the corner of her lips.

Mike gasps, sounding absolutely scandalized. "Why, Mrs. Wheeler, are you *propositioning* me?"

Mrs. Wheeler. God, El's so happy, she might burst. "And what if I was, Mr. Wheeler?"

"Well, then, I'm just going to have to respond like *this*." He leans in, then, and El lets her eyes flutter shut as his lips meet hers, both familiar and exhilarating at the same time. His mouth traps her lower lip between his, teeth tugging on the full flesh just a little, enough to make both of them moan, before his tongue traces the seam of her lips, her mouth parting as a soft gasp escapes from her. It's a kiss that

makes El feel like she's drowning and flying at the same time and she's so, so overwhelmed as she kisses him back, her fingers curling into the skin of his cheek just enough to dimple, just to give her something to anchor herself to.

The way Mike's mouth moves across hers is both sweet *and* hot, speaking to peaceful days and passionate nights and El suddenly *cannot wait* until she can be alone with him. That's going to be a little while, though – they're driving to Indianapolis after the reception and staying the night before flying out tomorrow for their honeymoon (two weeks in Aruba, she's *so excited*) – so it's going to be hours until it's just the two of them *alone*.

*(she's prepared, though, if the sheer, white lingerie she's packed away in her suitcase says anything – prepared for their first night as husband and wife and just the thought of it makes her shiver in anticipation, itching to be with him as desire slowly builds in her veins. hell, she's not entirely sure how she's going to keep her hands to herself on the **car ride over**, never mind waiting until they get into their hotel room.)*

The kiss ends and both of them are breathing a little hard, overwhelmed by each other as they always are. They sit there for a moment, leaning in so their foreheads are barely brushing against each other's. El's hand is still on Mike's cheek, his hand still covering hers while his other hand curves around her hip while he holds her close. In this moment, El feels safe and warm and *cherished*, like she can fly as high as she dares because Mike will *always* be there to catch her if she falls – just like she'll be there for him, forever and ever, just like she promised.

"I love you," El barely whispers, breath catching in her throat as everything she feels for Mike swells inside chest so keenly, she almost can't contain it all.

She opens her eyes to see him looking back at her, love shining brightly in his gaze, his face reflecting back at her all the emotion she's fighting to keep a hold of. "I love you, too."

They sit there like this for several long moments, even as the merriment of the reception roars around them with music and laughter and dancing. It's like the rest of the world doesn't even exist,

the two of them content with only each other, only *needing* each other. It's a quiet moment between husband and wife, a moment just for them, as they revel in their love for each other.

Unbeknownst to them, Jonathan, who's wedding gift to his sister and new brother-in-law is his services as wedding photographer, snaps a photo of just this moment – Mike and El sitting cuddled up at their table, staring into each other's eyes, her hand on his heart, their free hands clasped and resting beneath his ear after her hand slides there from his cheek. The rest of the shot is out of focus, just a beautiful blur of light and shapes as everything fades away, leaving only Mike and El in stark focus in the foreground. It's a beautiful piece of photography, taken by a master of his craft who knows how to be in the right place at just the right time.

Later, couple of weeks after Mike and El get back from their honeymoon, a package from Jonathan arrives in the mail: a photo album from their wedding, beautifully put together, cataloging the day their lives fully and officially merged. But there's something else in that box, a 5x7 framed print of that moment Jonathan captured, of Mike and El sitting as if they were the only two people on the face of the planet.

El almost cries when she sees it, struck by just how *beautiful* it is, even though in the photo Mike's not wearing his jacket or that the teased curls her hair had been worked up into had long since relaxed, frizzing just a little bit in the humidity.

No, none of that matters because the picture is *proof* – their love captured for all eternity, where they're happy and beautiful and so, so in love, all of that radiating from the photo in a way that can't be ignored.

El makes a copy of the picture so she can have on at work. She stares at it from time to time, drawn to it during all the good days but especially some of the more challenging ones that come her way, and she remembers that moment, remembers how blissfully in love they were and still are and always will be.

And, every time, she smiles.

Notes for the Chapter:

One more to go, folks! And then it's on to other Mileven fic!

7. September, 21 Months Together

Notes for the Chapter:

So, this is the final snapshot! Though it's not *really* a snapshot, not at 3.6k words, but you get where I'm coming from.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy and thank you for coming with me on this wild ride!

There are some things in life that are meticulously planned: like Mike's novels, or the choreography El dances to, or all the aspects of their wedding.

Then, there are some things, like how Mike and El met, that are completely unplanned, that no one could have thought to prepare for.

But, like a lot of things in life, there is a middle ground. There are things that you think will happen someday, that you roughly plan for, but still when they happen, it's a surprise.

This is one of those things.

Mike's nervous and El doesn't even have to be a mind reader to know it.

They're lying in bed late on a Friday night, snuggly and comfortable beneath the covers. It's the end of the second week of the Fall Semester and El's *exhausted*. Something about the start to this school year is seriously kicking her ass and El's so glad it's the end of the week. She's looking forward to sleeping in tomorrow morning, wrapped in Mike's embrace.

Said man is lying next to her, on his back while he stares up at the ceiling, one arm folded up behind his head while the other is wrapped around El's torso so she can pillow her head on his

shoulder. And he's absolutely *radiating* nervous energy, the lines of his body tight where he's pressed up against her and El can feel the way his jaw is clenched against the side of her head.

El reaches up and lays her hand on Mike's bare chest, palm pressed right over his heart. "Hey, are you ok?" she asks, tilting up her head so she can breathe the words against his skin. She speaks barely higher than a whisper, not wanting to break the intimate air that surrounds them.

Mike sighs and lets out a quiet, wry laugh. "I'm that transparent, huh?"

El caresses Mike's chest and she feels him shiver a little as she touches his sensitive skin. "To me? Very. So, wanna tell me what's going on? You're ruining the mood with how nervous you are." El taps his sternum lightly as she smiles at him to show that she's teasing.

Mike rolls his eyes, but he's a little amused by her quiet antics if the smile that starts to pull up the corners of his lips is any indication. But his brow is furrowed and his eyes are still full of worry. "I'm just...freaking out about the premiere next weekend."

An excited thrill runs up El's spine at the mention of the movie premiere. The first movie based off of Mike's books is being released in the next couple of weeks and the red carpet premiere is next weekend. The entire Party is going as Mike managed to score passes for everyone, so they're all flying down to LA to make a trip of it and El's both excited and so, so proud. But still, she frowns. "Why are you freaking out? Your book got made into a movie and it's *good*." The early reviews that have been coming in have been nothing but glowing and El's so happy for Mike that this is turning out to be a success. "You should be *thrilled*."

"And I am," Mike says quickly. "I'm so excited, I almost don't know what to do with myself." He pauses, sighing. "But it's just hitting me that we're going to the premiere where anyone could take my picture. DL Williams has been an anonymous figure this whole time, someone I could hide behind. What if someone pieces it together and everyone suddenly knows who I really am? What if someone from

school finds out? I might have to give up teaching and I-

Mike's words are picking up pace, his breathing rapidly heading into panic territory, and El cuts off the rest of the ramble by swiftly leaning over and capturing Mike's mouth in a hard kiss. For a moment, El lets herself get lost in the heat of his lips against hers, in the way he kisses her back like he's both a little caught off guard and never wants to stop. Love, fierce and overwhelming, swells in El's heart and her stomach does a funny little swoop as it hits her, once again, that she's married to this wonderful, *beautiful* man who loves her as much as she loves him.

El pulls away before she can get too carried away - and it's hard to do as burgeoning desire builds in her veins, making her want to forget everything but the feel of his body next to hers, moving with hers, but she shelves it away for later (but not *too* much later) - and looks up at him. She's breathing a bit hard as she focuses and smiles gently up at him. "Mike, no matter what happens, you will *never* have to give up teaching. But if you're this concerned about it, why don't you talk to Mr. Russell about it on Monday? Tell him about your concerns, see what he says?"

Mike's cheeks are a little flushed from their earlier kiss, his eyes just a little darker than they were moments ago, but he still smiles back with incredulity. "That's a great idea. Thank you." He breathes out a laugh. "What would I do without you?"

"Be horribly lost, that's what," El says with her own quiet laugh.

Mike reaches for her, then, bringing down the hand that's behind his head so he can cup her cheek. "Of course," he says before he pauses a moment, just staring at her. "Hey, so I've been meaning to ask you, since we're talking about being ok and everything: are *you* ok? Don't think I haven't noticed how tired you've been recently."

A wave of gratitude rolls through El that fights against the exhaustion that's been an almost constant companion for the past couple of weeks. "Yeah, I'm ok. Just getting back into the swing of the school year, you know?"

Mike's hand trails up from her cheek to slide into her hair, his palm

resting just beneath her ear. "Well, let me know if there's something I can do."

An impish thought comes to mind at Mike's words and, despite her exhaustion, El moves, shifting so that she can throw her leg over Mike's hips, her weight settling down so that she's straddling his waist. "Well, there's something you can do *right now*," El says, her voice pitching lower with need.

Mike's hands go to her hips, his touch warm and firm through the thin silk of El's nightgown. "Oh, there is, is there?" Mike says. A smile graces the curl of his lips, cheeky and so very in love and El's heart thumps hard in her chest at the sight. "Hmm, I'm afraid I'm going to need more of a hint than that. I want to make sure I get this right."

El bites back a giggle as she reaches for the hem of her nightgown, back arching as she pulls the fabric up and over her head. Mike's hands go to her hips once more and he grips her tight, fingers curling into her flesh, and a thrill races through El's veins at the gasp he lets out as she bares herself to him. El shakes her hair free of her nightgown before she tosses it aside and she looks down to see him staring back at her, the look in his eyes an intoxicating combination of love and desire. "How's this for a hint?"

There's a moment as Mike stares up at her - cheeks flushed, eyes wide and dark, lips parted just so - and then he moves, sitting up so that their bare chests are almost brushing up against each other. "I love you, you know that?"

"I do," El says, breathing out the words. "And I love you too." El slides her hands up Mike's arms so she can clasp them behind his neck. "And I would *especially* love it if my husband kissed me right now."

Mike laughs, smile turning awed and incredulous. "Well, then, who am I to deny my wife what she wants?" He leans in, then, lips capturing hers in another fierce kiss. But this time, neither of them pull away and everything - his nervousness, her exhaustion - fades away in the wake of the passion that overtakes them as they lose themselves in each other....

Completely unaware of how *everything* is about to change.

It takes El an embarrassing amount of time to figure out what's going on. Like *really* embarrassing.

To be fair, she's been feeling like she's been running around like a chicken with it's head cut off like she normally does at the beginning of the school year, so really, it's a mistake anyone can make. *And*, well...it's not like she didn't know it could happen this soon.

She just didn't think it *would*.

So, naturally, she checked and then double-checked and then had someone else check. And now she's sitting here, in a hotel room in LA, cell phone clutched to her chest, while Mike is in the other room taking a shower as they get ready for the premiere of the movie made from his book. She's pretty much ready to go, wearing a robe over her underwear, her hair and makeup pristine and perfect - at this point, all she needs is to slip on the dress she bought for the occasion.

But she's frozen in place, shock and awe and happiness and not a little fear mixing in her veins, making her feel a little short of breath.

Because El's pregnant and, if the call she just got from her doctor is any indication, she's about 6 weeks along.

She honestly wasn't expecting this quite so soon.

Right before she and Mike got married, they decided that once they got back from their honeymoon, she would go off birth control and they would start trying to have kids. They were both as ready as they were gonna get, they figured - they both want very much to be parents, to have kids together.

So, El went in and had the IUD removed. Her doctor told her it could be a while before her body settled back into it's normal rhythms, that odds are it would take her a while to get pregnant. *6 months* was what the doctor gave for her as a benchmark, so 6 months was what

El was expecting. Granted, she knew it could still happen earlier, so El stopped drinking alcohol and started eating a little healthier, but pretty much just put the rest of the matter out of her head. If it happened earlier, it would happen, but she wasn't really going to pay attention to it until after those 6 months.

And, 3 months later, here she is. Pregnant.

She and Mike are going to have a baby.

The shock is fading, but the awe is still there, as well as the fear that El has to assume all new parents feel - *holy shit, she's going to be a parent* - but she's so, so happy she gets to do this with Mike, that he's going to be by her side, that he wants this just as much as she does.

Now she just has to tell him.

For a moment, she thinks that maybe she'll wait to tell Mike until after the premiere is over - he's been worried enough as it is with everything surrounding it. Mike's just a worrier by nature and El doesn't want to overload him. But she also doesn't want to *hide* this from him - hiding's just another form of lying, after all.

So, El goes back and forth over what to do and she's so caught up in her thoughts that she doesn't hear the shower turn off. She jumps when the bathroom door opens and she looks over in time to see Mike walking out, towel wrapped around his waist. "You know, I think when we get home, I wanna figure out-" He stops as he looks back over at her, his face immediately morphing into a concerned expression and El knows all of her emotions are plastered across every inch of her face. "El, what's wrong?"

And that's when she knows.

She *has* to tell him.

Whatever half-brained, inane thing Mike *had* been saying completely disappears from his mind the second he sees El sitting on the bed, her

hands clutching her phone to her chest. She's staring at him like she's surprised to see him, mouth agape, her face a little pale, a bright pink flush that stands out high on her cheeks. He doesn't know what to make of it, doesn't know *what* could be making her look so *shocked* . But all that really matters is that something has happened and it's happened to his *wife*.

(there are days where he still doesn't believe that this beautiful, sublime creature agreed to marry him, agreed to let him be with her every day for the rest of their lives. and mike knows he'll spend the rest of his life treating el like she's the most magical, wonderful person on the face of the planet. because she is.)

"El, what's wrong?" Mike asks and he doesn't even wait for her to answer before he's moving towards her, completely not caring that he's only in a towel as he crouches in front of her, one hand on her robe-covered knee, while the other reaches for the hands that are clasped over her phone. He looks up at her, eyes searching for a hint, a *clue* for what could be causing this, like if he looks hard enough, the answer will jump out at him. "Did something happen? Is everyone ok?"

El lets out a shaky breath, some of the tension bleeding from her, and she gives him a tremulous smile as her hands shift beneath his touch, one of them sliding out so she can set her phone down while the other takes his, their fingers twining together as naturally as breathing. "Mike," she all but breathes, her voice a little shaky, eyes glossing over with a thin sheen of tears. She draws in another breath and it's like it resets her a little, because she lets out a small laugh, shaking her head just enough to shift her hair against her neck and shoulders. "Mike, *oh my god*."

Yeah, none of this helping and now Mike's just *confused*. "El?"

El giggles and leans in, her free hand coming down to cup his cheek so she can tilt his face before she kisses him. Her lips are soft against his and Mike finds himself instinctually kissing her back, his heart doing a funny, beat-skipping flip in his chest at the feel of her mouth against his like always. But he's still *really* confused and he just needs answers, so he ends the kiss, pulling back enough so he can take the hand from her knee and bring it up to rest on the side of her neck.

“El, please, what’s going on?”

El looks him in the eye and her lips pull up in a small smile, looking so beautiful that Mike almost forgets his own name. “Mike,” she says slowly, taking in a deep breath. There’s a moment before she speaks, an almost breathless eternity of a moment and Mike can’t look away, can’t stop staring at her. “Mike, I’m pregnant.”

For a moment, Mike doesn’t understand what El’s saying. But, after a few seconds, the words, *and their meaning*, start to sink in, and Mike almost feels like he can’t breathe, like he doesn’t know what to feel. “Are - are you sure?”

El nods and sniffs before her breath escapes her in a sound that is somewhere between a laugh and a sob. “I’m sure. The doctor just called me to confirm it.”

The shock is starting to fade and the beginnings of hope, full of love and happiness, start to weave through every fiber of his heart, even though he’s still confused. “But, I thought-”

“I know.”

“And your doctor, she said-”

“I know.”

“I didn’t think-”

“Me neither.”

It’s a testament to the strength of their relationship, of how much they love each other, that Mike doesn’t have to finish *any* of his sentences for El to know what he’s trying to say and he’s never loved her more. “El, are we-?”

El’s other hand comes up so that she’s cupping his face in both palms. “Mike, you and I are having a baby. We’re gonna be *parents*.”

With a hand that is now trembling, Mike rotates his wrist so he can press his palm gently above El’s stomach, right below her waist. There, beneath layers of skin and blood and flesh, is a child. *Their*

child. "We're having a baby," he breathes back.

El nods, lower lip trembling even though she's smiling, emotions racing through her like they're doing for him. "We are."

Mike stares at her, then, dumbfounded with all the things he's feeling. Happiness and love and a little bit of fear - yes, *fear*; he's going to be a dad and he has *no idea* what he's doing - swell in his chest, infusing him with a warmth so overwhelming, Mike nearly doesn't know what to do with himself. But he does know that he is so unbelievably in love with the woman in front of him, the woman who's his best friend, the love of his life, the person he married and wants to spend forever with...and now the mother of his child.

So Mike does the only thing he can think of to do.

He kisses her.

A small sob escapes him, a sound she echoes, as their lips meet, his hands going to slide into her hair, hers resting against his bare chest. He kisses her like she's *everything* because, to him, she *is*.

For Mike, kids have always been something he's wanted...but only with the right person. And it didn't take long for Mike to know that El is the only person he ever wants to have them with. They'd talked about it right before they got married and they're just about as ready for it as anyone ever is, but Mike wasn't expecting it so soon, not when El told him it would probably take six months or so until her body was ready according to her doctor. Naturally, of course, they never used any other protection - if she happened to get pregnant earlier than expected, well, then that's what would happen.

And that's what *did* happen.

They're going to be *parents*.

And Mike's almost never been happier about anything in his entire life.

Their lips slide against each other with exciting and excruciating sweetness, mouths eager and suffused with emotion, and Mike can't help the way the beginnings of desire stir in his veins, not when she's

kissing him back like she never wants, never *needs* anyone but him for the rest of her life. He wants them to always be like this, wants to always love her as much as he does, wants to be a man worthy of receiving her love in return.

In a little bit, he'll pull away from her kisses, filled with questions and concern and awed words, love in every breath. She'll answer and reassure and marvel over what's happened to them, both of them so very, *very* happy. He'll try to convince her to skip the premiere, not the least because he kinda wants to celebrate with just the two of them (and, if the way she's looking at him is any indication, she wants to celebrate with absolutely no clothing and, hey, it's not like he needs to worry about knocking her up *since he already did that*). But she'll convince him that she got all dolled up and everyone will be waiting for them and he deserves to have this moment in the spotlight, that they can celebrate later.

So, they'll go to the premiere and if anyone notices just how bright Mike and El's smiles are, they'll just figure they're excited and overwhelmed by how everything has culminated in this moment. And, after the premiere, they'll celebrate the fact that they're going to be parents, alone in their hotel room, where Mike will love and cherish the woman who's carrying his child, where El will love him right back, her touch a balm for his soul that still somehow sets him on fire.

The next 9 or so months will be *interesting* to say the least - El won't have morning sickness, but she'll be *tired* almost all the time until about halfway through her pregnancy and then, once she starts showing - beautiful and glowing and Mike will forever be fascinated with the curve of her belly, of the body that shifts and changes to grow a tiny person inside of her - her hormones will be *all over the place* and she'll vacillate between emotions at the drop of a hat.

But they'll weather it together, like they always do, and when it's time, they'll welcome Grace Anne Wheeler into the world after 19 hours of labor, where both of them will instantly fall in love with the little girl who'll become known to them as "Gracie" as she gets older.

Later, a few years later, they'll give Gracie a sibling, a little sister named Sarah, rounding out their happy family with love and giggles,

who Mike and El will love just as much.

The years ahead will be filled with happiness and love, ups and downs, life taking the strange twists and turns it always does. And no matter what happens to Mike and El, no matter where life takes them - from being parents, to dealing with the fallout when *everyone* at school finds out that he's DL Williams, to just living together, day after day - Mike and El know that they will *always* have each other.

But, in this moment - this beautiful, *glorious* moment - there's just the two of them and the love that they share, her mouth sweet against his, his hands gently cupping her cheeks, happy and in love, their future stretched out in front of them so bright it's almost blinding.

And he falls in love with her all over again, just like he does everyday, just like he will do everyday for the rest of their lives.

Because, at the end of the day, they're Mike and El.

Like they were *always* meant to be.

The End

Notes for the Chapter:

So, for the moment, I think this is for me and this universe! I may come back and visit it someday, but I'm ready to move onto other Mileven projects. I'm glad I got to round it out this way, but I can feel myself starting to scrape the bottom of the barrel here.

Up next is a one shot I have planned for "love's missing moments" and then I've got two completely new AUs in the works, so be on the look out for those!

Again, thank you so much for sticking around to the very end. I love and appreciated every one of you and I love hearing from you, even if I'm *horrible* at answering comments (I read and cherish every one of them, though, never worry about that).

See you on the flip side!